NEWS RELEASE

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection

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Smartphones and Tablets – Is Your Privacy at Risk?

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MADISON – Stop. Think. Connect.

For Data Privacy Day on January 28th, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection is asking consumers to take control of how they use personal data online, especially when using smartphones and tablets.

"Viruses, spyware and other security threats are finding their way into our pockets as consumers use their mobile devices to conduct more of their daily activities," said Sandy Chalmers, Division Administrator of Trade and Consumer Protection. "If you're using a mobile device for shopping, banking or web browsing, take steps to protect your privacy and security."

Smartphones and tablet computers were high on many holiday gift lists in 2011. In fact, the Consumer Electronics Association estimates that 22% of global spending on gadgets this year will be in the smartphone category.

One new type of security concern for mobile devices is in their use of GPS information for many applications. "Geotagging" involves the addition of GPS data to the underlying file information for a digital image. Smartphones with GPS capabilities are often preset to add this data to any image taken from the unit. This data could allow a stalker to track your movement as you take images and post them to the internet.

A quick online search will provide you with directions on cancelling geotagging on any of the major smartphone platforms. If you wish to continue using location-based services on your phone apart from the camera application, you may be able to disable the geotagging feature through the camera tool's menu.

Since smartphones and tablets are portable computers, many of the security steps that affect home and work computer usage apply to the devices. Here are some tips for using mobile devices safely:

- **Keep software up to date** – updating your smartphone and tablet operating systems and applications can patch holes that hackers can use to access your system.
- **Passwords** – mix letters, numbers and special characters to create passwords that are at least 10 characters long. For added security, set your device to require regular password unlocks.
- **Use caution on public networks** – if you are using a public Wi-Fi hotspot to connect to your personal accounts on a mobile device, limit the type of business you conduct and set your device to hide your password character entries.
- **Always keep your phone in a secure location** – your smartphone and tablet contain a wealth of personal information like your contacts, messages and schedules. Know where your phone is at all times and keep it locked away in public.

"The rise in smartphone and tablet use will require an increased level of vigilance in keeping personal information safe," said Chalmers. "By taking a few active steps, you can tighten the security around the personal information you have posted online."

For more information or to file a consumer complaint, visit Consumer Protection's website at datcp.wisconsin.gov; via e-mail at datcphotline@wisconsin.gov or call toll-free at 1-800-422-7128. Consumers can also visit staysafeonline.org to learn about protecting their devices, identifying "spam" emails and "phishing" scams, and scanning their computers for viruses using free online resources.

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